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Greece: Threat of Terrorism and Security at the Olympics

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Summary

The summer 2004 Olympic Games will take place in Athens, Greece, where their success is a point of national pride. The Greek government is planning unprecedented security measures to deal with possible terrorist threats. Attacks by Al Qaeda or its allies in Europe and elsewhere heightened the government's awareness of the potential for terrorism at the Olympics. Athens believes that it has effectively dismantled major domestic terrorist groups in recent years and is preparing mainly for external threats, although anarchists and anti-globalization groups may be disruptive as well. The Greek Ministry of Public Order is in charge of security and Greece requested assistance from NATO and others, including the United States. The U.S. Administration is taking its own steps to protect the U.S. Olympic team. This report will be updated if developments warrant. See also CRS Report RS21529, *Al Qaeda after the Iraq Conflict*, May 23, 2003, by Audrey Kurth Cronin, and CRS Electronic Briefing Book, *Terrorism*, page on "Al Qaeda," updated regularly by Kenneth Katzman, [<http://www.congress.gov/brbk/html/ebter131.html>].

Introduction

The summer 2004 Olympic Games will take place in Athens, Greece on August 13-29, with 10,500 athletes from 202 countries participating and more than one million spectators expected. The first Olympic games took place in Greece in 776 B.C. and the first modern Olympics were held in Athens in 1896. Therefore, hosting a successful Olympics is a point of national pride and the highest priority of the Greek government. Underscoring its importance, Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis assumed the post of Minister of Culture to be directly responsible for the Olympics when he took office in March 2004. He has promised "the best and safest Olympic Games there have ever been."¹ Karamanlis's deputy is Alternate Culture Minister Fani Palli-Petralia. The

¹ "PM Issues Global Invitation to 'The Best and Safest Olympics,'" *Athens News Agency*, March 25, 2004.

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President of the Athens Olympics Organizing Committee (ATHOC) is Gianna Angelopoulos-Daskalaki.

Greece is the smallest country to host an Olympics since Finland in 1952, and questions have arisen about its ability to cope with the many facets of the task — from completing construction of numerous new sports venues and infrastructure for Olympic activities on time to providing adequate security for teams and tourists. This report deals only with one facet: possible terrorist threats and security.

Potential Terrorist Threats

Terrorism and violence are not new to the Olympics. Palestinian terrorists kidnapped and murdered Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972, and an American has been charged with the bombing near the 1996 Olympics in Atlanta. Terrorists reportedly planned to attack other Olympics, but did not succeed.² Since 9/11, international awareness of terrorism has heightened, and Greek security planners face a variety of challenges.

Domestic Threats. Until recently, Greece's record in combating domestic terrorism was widely regarded as deficient. A group called the Revolutionary Organization 17 November (17N) had acted with impunity since 1975, claiming responsibility for assassinating four U.S. officials and many others. Following the fortuitous arrest of a 17N terrorist in June 2002 after a bomb exploded in his hands prematurely, Greek authorities captured suspected leaders and members of the group. Those arrested were successfully prosecuted, with 15 of the accused receiving long prison sentences in December 2003. No new acts of terrorism have been attributed to 17N since the 2002 arrests, and Greek Police Chief Fotis Nasiakos has stated, "17N does not exist anymore."³ The U.S. State Department, however, has kept 17N on its annual list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations in *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2003*, noting that the Chief had stated "that additional members of the group are at large, and investigations are continuing."⁴

After their success against 17N, Greek authorities focused on the Revolutionary People's Struggle (ELA). ELA also had been active since 1975 and had asserted that it was responsible for hundreds of bombings and at least two murders. *Patterns of Global Terrorism, 2003* lists Revolutionary Nuclei (RN) as a Foreign Terrorist Organization and refers to it as a probable successor to or an offshoot of ELA, which had not claimed responsibility for any acts since 1995 and is no longer on the State Department list. RN engaged in arson and low-level bombing; it has not claimed an attack since 2000. Five members of ELA captured in January 2003 and accused of crimes including bombing

² Gregory L. Vistica, "For Athens Olympics, A Security Gap," *Washington Post*, September 27, 2003.

³ Ioanna Mandhrou, "The New Counter-Terrorism Prosecutor Assumed his Duties Yesterday," *To Vima*, April 20, 2004, Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS) Document GMP20040421000175.

⁴ U.S. State Department, *Patterns of Global Terrorism 2003*, released April 2004.

vehicles and facilities used by the U.S. military are now on trial. The Greek government believes that ELA, like 17N, has been effectively dismantled.

Some analysts suggest that if remnants of 17N and ELA were still at large, they would not act during the Olympics because of their professed “patriotism” or nationalism.⁵ However, such sentiments may not inhibit anarchist groups which operate mostly in the Athens area and target popular U.S. and allied businesses, for example American Express, Citibank, and McDonald’s.⁶ They usually attack when premises are unoccupied and use low-level weapons such as firebombs. There is some concern that Greek anarchists may ally with like-minded anti-globalization groups both in Greece and from elsewhere in Europe during the Olympics.⁷ They have the potential to wreak havoc when an unusually large number of foreign tourists flood the city.

Greece also has an indigenous Muslim population, as well as a large number of residents from Muslim and Arab countries. There have been no reports of radical Islamist terrorist groups operating in Greece; but police surveillance of Muslims reportedly has been increased in anticipation of the Olympics.⁸ And, although domestic terrorist groups have not been tied to international terror networks, some media reports have alleged that ELA trained with Palestinian counterparts in Lebanon, suggesting that other international links may be possible.⁹

International Threats. The Athens Olympics are the first summer games to be held since Al Qaeda attacked the United States on September 11, 2001. Alleged Al Qaeda links to the November 2003 bombings in nearby Istanbul and the March 11, 2004 bombing of a commuter train in Madrid have heightened the Greek government’s already keen awareness of a possible international terrorist threat to the Olympics. Al Qaeda has made no specific or known threat against the Olympics. Moreover, responding to allegations that “Al Qaeda and its terrorist affiliates have long been known to operate in Greece...,” the U.S. State Department stated in August 2003 that there was “no information to substantiate a verifiable Al Qaeda presence in Greece.”¹⁰ On April 15, 2004, however, Al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden offered Europeans a “peace treaty” if they withdrew their troops from Muslim countries. His message said that “the door of peace will remain open” for three months. The Olympics will occur just weeks after Bin Laden’s deadline expires, intensifying concerns that the Games might be a high value

⁵ See e.g., comments by Mary Bosis, a Greek terrorism expert, on Athens NET Television Network, December 10, 2003, FBIS Document GMP10031210000095.

⁶ One newspaper listed about 100 such groups. Aryiro K. Morou, “The Gas Canister Arsonists of Athens,” *Elevtheroptia*, September 9, 2003, FBIS Document GMP20030915000208.

⁷ “EL.AS. (Greek Police) Confirms the Existence of an Anarchist ‘Axis’,” *To Vima*, January 21, 2004, FBIS Document GMP20040121000090.

⁸ Iason Athanasidis, “Muslims Living in Greece Come Under Intelligence Spotlight Ahead of Olympics,” *International Herald Tribune*, April 7, 2004.

⁹ A. Telloglu, “A War between Intelligence Agencies,” *To Vima tis Kiriakis*, September 2, 2002, FBIS Document GMP20020916000013.

¹⁰ The allegations were made by Philip Shenon, “U.S. is Inspecting Overseas Airport for Missile Threats,” *New York Times*, August 7, 2003; Athens News Agency, August 12, 2003.

symbolic European target for Al Qaeda. On April 19, Secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge included the Olympics on a list of possible terrorist targets.

Some experts believe that Al Qaeda will be attracted to the Greek Olympics to communicate its message to an audience of billions, to strike in the cradle of Western democracy, and to attack Western citizens and interests.¹¹ Countries whose nationals are considered to be at high risk during the Olympics include the United States and its allies in the Iraq war, such as Britain, plus Israel, Saudi Arabia, and Russia — because of the Chechen problem. A dissenting view is heard from those who suggest that anxiety about Al Qaeda terrorism at the Olympics may be exaggerated or maintain that Greek security measures (see below) will accomplish their purpose of effectively hardening otherwise “soft” tourism-related targets.¹²

Concern about Greece’s vulnerability to penetration by international terrorist groups is partly due to the existence of countless points of entry into the country and to its arguably defective border and passport controls. Greece has thousands of islands in the Aegean, Ionian and Mediterranean Seas, and is close to Middle Eastern and Balkan hot spots. Greek authorities are making a special effort to get their northern neighbors, particularly Albania, to assist in securing borders for the Olympics, and the European Union (EU) reportedly is permitting Greece to enforce stricter immigration controls than otherwise allowed under the Schengen Agreement on free movement of EU citizens. However, Greece already has many illegal residents from the Balkans and the Middle East. Athens has not yet fully implemented a plan for central control over issuing passports, which remains the prerogative of local prefects. Nor has it begun to issue more secure passport documents.

Security Planning

Domestic Planning.¹³ The Greek government is taking its obligations as a host responsible for the safety of hundreds of thousands of guests seriously. It is spending \$1.2 billion to secure the Olympics, and plans to deploy 40,000 police officers and 10,000 soldiers, 200 of whom have been trained to deal with nuclear, chemical, and biological attacks. The Public Order Ministry is the lead agency for Olympic security and, because it believes that there is no more domestic threat, it is primarily focusing on external threats. Given the nature of the Greek government, where ministers usually operate autonomously and are responsible solely to the Prime Minister, coordination is considered both a possible weakness and a priority for Olympic preparations. The government has

¹¹ Al Qaeda struck at tourists or other Western targets and interests in the United States, Indonesia, Morocco, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and attempted to strike Israeli tourists in Kenya.

¹² One local skeptic has suggested that Greece may not be facing a great terrorist threat because: 1) it hosts only “small, peaceful communities” of Arabs who are monitored by police; 2) there are no local extremist groups to take assignments from Al Qaeda; 3) Greece enjoys friendly relations with Arab countries; and 4) Greece’s security forces are prepared. Yeoryios Karaivaz, “The Greek Police Scenarios on Security,” *Eleftheros Tipos*, March 15, 2004, FBIS Document GMP20040315000136.

¹³ Greek media have reported on security copiously, critically, and in detail. See e.g., Andonios Bosnakoudhis, “Olympic Games’ Security,” *Amina & Dhiplomatia*, February 1, 2004, 39 pages, FBIS Document GMP 20040211000086.

created a special Coordinating Council for Olympic Security, consisting of 10 ministers and chaired by the Minister of Public Order. Early security exercises confirmed, however, that coordination was still a problem.

The Greek government contracted with the U.S.-based Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) to provide components of the security infrastructure for the Olympics at a cost of about \$250 million.¹⁴ SAIC heads an international consortium helping Greece with security that includes Siemens, Nokia, AMS, E Team, and the Greek companies ALTEC, Diekat, and Pouliadis-PC Systems. It is providing elements for security at sporting venues, the Olympic Village (where athletes will live), and ports where cruise ships housing visitors will be docked. SAIC is building security command centers for the government to connect the police, the national first aid center, fire department, coast guard, and armed forces, and creating security systems, mainly surveillance equipment and management. Plans call for about 1,400 security cameras to be positioned at Olympic facilities and at central points in Attica (a large prefecture that includes Athens), for a no-fly zone over Olympic sites, and for a security blimp. Competitors from “high risk” countries, presumably including the United States, Britain, Spain, and Israel, will have Greek security escorts. Some, including the U.S. and Israeli teams, also will have their own security forces.

Greece has conducted seven security exercises and more are scheduled. From March 10-23, 2004, foreign forces, including 400 U.S. special operations forces, joined Greeks in dealing with multiple terrorism scenarios for suicide bombings, chemical and biological attacks, and plane hijackings. There were some problems with coordination and communication, but Greek officials said that the exercise had served the purpose of identifying areas for necessary improvements and adjustments in security plans.¹⁵

Several foreign newspapers have reported that delays in constructing some event venues may detrimentally affect plans to secure those sites.¹⁶ They noted that contractors cannot install surveillance cameras without walls, and police officers cannot familiarize themselves with potential terrorist hiding places while venues are still construction sites. In response, the Public Order Minister declared, “The delays will not affect security preparations in any way.”¹⁷

International Assistance. Greeks are extremely sensitive about their national sovereignty, so requests for international assistance with security for the Olympics were viewed as potentially politically explosive. Nonetheless, in 2000, the Greek government established a seven-nation Olympic Advisory Group from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Israel, Australia, France, and Spain. Members have a headquarters

¹⁴ SAIC News Release, May 22, 2003.

¹⁵ Clifford J. Levy, “Uneasy Greece Focus on Olympic Security,” *New York Times*, April 7, 2004; also see Embassy of Greece in Washington, D. C., Press Office, News Review for March, April 14, 2004, at [<http://www.greekembassy.org>].

¹⁶ Levy, *New York Times*, April 7, 2004, and Laura Peek, “Security the Loser in Athens Race,” *The Times* (London), April 13, 2004.

¹⁷ Helena Smith, “Clock Ticks as Athens Sprints for the Line: With Less than Four Months to Go, Can Greece Turn an Embarrassment into an Olympic Triumph,” *Guardian*, April 22, 2004.

in Athens and have participated in training Greek Olympics security forces, focusing on the potential for transnational terrorism. For example, Israeli specialists conducted training on identifying and neutralizing suicide bombers. Greece also received security advice from governments not in the Advisory Group, notably Russia, which reportedly is sending mobile laboratories to help in the event of a nuclear, biological, chemical attack and putting special forces on standby to deal with a possible Chechen threat.

Although discussions had taken place earlier, Greece officially requested NATO assistance only after the train bombing in Madrid in March 2004. The request included AWACs planes for air policing and for dealing with a possible air attack; the Standing Naval Force Mediterranean to patrol extraterritorial waters around Greece; assistance with nuclear and biochemical defenses; and intelligence. No NATO ground forces were requested. NATO ships have conducted enhanced patrols in the Mediterranean since 9/11. The U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is providing advice and equipment to help detect radiological dispersion devices, i.e., “dirty bombs.” Greece also is counting on improved coordination and exchange of information with other EU countries promised at an EU summit and meeting of interior and justice ministers in March 2004.

U.S. Measures and Aid. A U.S. interagency task force with members from the CIA, the FBI, State, and Defense Departments reportedly is focusing on the Olympics.¹⁸ The U.S. State Department Bureau of Diplomatic Security will provide the U.S. Olympic team with a security force of 100-110 agents, analysts, and administrators.¹⁹ The American area in the Olympic Village will have special security arrangements. Aside from the Department of State, Greek officials have consulted with the National Security Council, Departments of Justice (FBI), Homeland Security, Energy, and the CIA. Several agencies are providing equipment and training for Olympics security forces. The Department of Energy is supplying radiation detectors to thwart “dirty bombs” at border crossings. Greece specifically requested U.S. aid with port security and shipping container issues.²⁰ The Department of Defense reportedly will position an aircraft carrier, other ships, and rapid reaction forces in international waters off Greece before and during the Olympics.²¹

¹⁸ Vistica, *Washington Post*, September 27, 2003.

¹⁹ The State Department plans to spend \$2,763,000 for 150 Special Agents to be assigned on temporary duty to Athens and environs prior to and during the Olympic games. The funds cover airfare, per diem, lodging, shipment of armored vehicles, local transportation, and other support costs. See Department of State, *The Budget in Brief - Fiscal Year 2004*. S. 2144, the proposed Foreign Affairs Authorization Act, FY2005, Sec. 205 directs the Secretary of State to seek, to the extent practicable, reimbursement from the U.S. Olympic Committee for security provided to the U.S. Olympic Team by the Diplomatic Security Special Agents during the 2004 Summer Olympics. S.Rept. 108-248 was filed on March 12, 2004, and the bill was placed on the Senate legislative calendar on March 18. State Department offices and federal agencies assisting Greece with security are using funds from regular appropriations.

²⁰ Western Policy Center forum, October 2, 2003.

²¹ N. Khasapopoulos, “The Request for NATO Participation has been Tabled,” *To Vima*, March 16, 2004, FBIS Document GMP20040402000113.